

**Education Committee
Wednesday, March 15, 2023**

House Bill 6881: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators - Support

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Vivienne McKillop and I am a resident of Salem. I have worked in the Groton School District as a Special Education Paraprofessional for 5 years. I offer the following testimony in support of HB 6881: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators:

Imagine working in a job where no matter how well you perform, you're treated the same way as someone who is new to the role, an employee who has no experience working in a classroom or with Special Needs children. Imagine a job where there are no promotional prospects, little training and no guarantee of any increase in pay each year! It does not matter if you are the best or worst employee there are simply no prospects or recognition. Today, I am here to share with you the conditions I currently work under as a Paraprofessional.

In my role as a Paraprofessional, I earn \$15.78 an hour. A new Paraprofessional in my district starts at \$15 an hour. I have been in the job for 5 years and when I took the job, I already had previous classroom and teaching experience. This is what my District chooses to pay an experienced and loyal teacher. I have shown Groton my loyalty, I am reliable and experienced, yet my district does not share the same loyalty back. I have no idea if I will get a pay increase this year or even keep my job next year. My 15-year-old daughter earns more than \$15 as a weekend ski instructor. How can this salary and conditions be justified and how can you hope to recruit loyal and motivated people? Isn't that what the children of Connecticut deserve.

I absolutely love my job and the children that I work with. There is nowhere else that I want to work. However, the role as a Paraprofessional has become less valued by the administration and with the increased cost of living, I may be forced to look for other options.

Let me share some background about myself. Prior to my current position, I worked in England at Canterbury College as a Lecturer in Business Travel and Tourism. I had a class of students and created assignments, graded and mentored the class. On arrival in the USA, I returned to college to add to my existing teaching certificate. In April, I graduate; opening many new opportunities for me. I am lucky I will have options in the future but most of my colleagues don't. There is no job progression for Paraprofessionals. The options available are to leave or take on a second or third job.

Within my district, I am currently employed as an Enhanced Para (no this does not mean I get paid more). This means that I work full time with 3 students. I spend my days with these 3 kids going to every class; they are totally dependent on me to get through their day. I also provide reading support and administer tests. The only break I get is 30 minutes for lunch. In Math class, I work with them on a completely different curriculum and have to teach and grade their work. My job is no different to the tutors in the district except they get paid DOUBLE what I earn. The Groton School District is certainly getting their money's worth out of me.

Even though I spend every day with my students, when it comes to PPT's, I am not invited along. These are conducted by a roomful of people some of whom spend less than 10 minutes with the child a week! These professionals decide what methods I need to implement in the classroom when working with my students without consulting me. The person who understands the child's learning needs the most is not required or rarely consulted. This makes me feel disrespected and not valued in my role.

The role of a Paraprofessional is essential to the support and development of a child. This support is written into students' IEPs and parents believe that their child is getting the full support which was legally agreed to when they attend a PPT. Yet currently on my team, there is only one Para (me) and at least 5 kids that need a Para. I work with three of them and the other two are supported by my boss who is the team Special Ed teacher.

Recruitment seems to be a huge problem for the district. During the year, they have tried to attract people to the position; one Para lasted a day and the other lasted a week. I believe this is because of the low wage (\$15 an hour), which is lower than any other position in the school district. Yes, custodians, security guards and tutors are all paid more than a paraprofessional.

I believe if the State were to implement House Bill 6881, which will create a living wage for Paraprofessionals, it would attract a higher standard of employee to the job. Secondly, the role needs to provide an opportunity for job progression and benefits such as affordable health insurance and a strong retirement plan. This would mean that schools would be able to hire and retain quality trained staff.

Paraprofessionals are crucial to support Special Needs Children of Connecticut, who deserve the best chance to succeed in life. Thank you for listening. And, I urge you to support House Bill 6881.

Vivienne McKillop
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